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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001590

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: STANDSTILL LOOMS FOR TURKEY'S EU ACCESSION BID

REF: ANKARA 1568

Classified By: POL Counselor Daniel O'Grady, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Turkey is on track to open the Environment Chapter under the Swedish EU presidency, but has run out of "easy" technical chapters to open after the beginning of 2010 and could face a standstill in its EU accession bid. Ankara already has abandoned its previous policy of trying to open two chapters per presidency. The flagging momentum has much to do with the eight chapters officially frozen and nine unofficially suspended because of the ongoing Cyprus Problem.

The Turkish Government appears to have no firm course of action beyond the next couple of months, although its rhetoric remains resolute and upbeat. The EU Progress Report's focus on Cyprus may be prescient since restoring the momentum to Turkey's EU bid may well depend on a successful outcome in the Nicosia negotiations. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Internally and externally, Turkey's 12th EU progress report was received with positive reviews. The Turkish EU Secretariat said it appreciated the report's recognition of the appointment of an EU negotiator, the democratic opening initiative, the existence of a functioning market economy, and Turkish-Armenian reconciliation efforts. Both the EU Secretariat and the MFA, however, criticized the report's portrayal of the Cyprus issue.

Status of Key Chapters  
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¶3. (SBU) Despite making some progress on most chapters, Turkey is finding it difficult to make headway on its EU accession bid with 8 chapters officially frozen because of the ongoing Cyprus Problem. In addition, Ankara faces political obstacles to making constitutional reforms. Seval Isik, Director of Accession Policy for the Turkish Secretary General for EU Affairs, privately commented to us that Turkey can only realistically work on opening one of four technical chapters during the Spanish or Belgium presidencies: Public Procurement; Food Safety, Veterinary, and Phytosanitary Policy; Social Policy and Employment; and Competition Policy.

Both the Turkish EU Secretariat and the Swedish Embassy told us they expect Turkey to open the Environment Chapter in December and that they will try to make progress -- although they are doubtful significant progress will be made -- on the Energy, and Education and Culture chapters. Regarding the Competition Policy Chapter, Isik commented that this chapter is hard to adopt because state aid laws would need to be implemented.

14. (SBU) The situation in Cyprus continues to be a major obstacle to implementing reforms. The Turkish EU Secretariat, EU Commission, and Swedish Embassy all agree that Turkey must actively try to solve the Cyprus Problem to allow Ankara to move on the blocked chapters. Swedish Embassy DCM Urban Andersson commented that his government does not think anything will be done on the Ankara Additional Protocol by year's end and that it seems both sides are hardening their positions. The situation is probably going to worsen with Turkey's objection over the European Parliament's claims this week that Turkey has hindered EU-NATO cooperation by objecting to extending EU-NATO strategic cooperation beyond the "Berlin Plus" arrangements over its concerns related to Cyprus, thus paving the way for less security for EU personnel.

15. (SBU) Andersson commented that the political will might not exist in Turkey to make these difficult, sensitive political reforms, particularly because there is an internal divide within the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) over these issues. Some AKP members do not think EU accession will happen, he said, and so doubt the value of making make painful, unpopular reforms that are likely to be politically costly. However, Andersson indicated he personally thought the EU could do more to make progress on the Energy, and Foreign Security and Defense Diplomacy chapters to facilitate the process for Turkey-- because it is in the EU's interest. The EU would benefit, he said, from an alternative gas route through Turkey and the advantages inherent in enhanced EU-NATO cooperation.

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#### Turkey's Haphazard Reform Plan

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16. (SBU) According to our EU interlocutors, Turkey is now approaching the EU process in 12 month intervals, rather than its previous policy of trying to open two chapters per presidency. Yet Turkey will be lucky if it can open one chapter per presidency, they say, because all of the "easy" chapters have already been opened. Although Ankara often gives the impression it is entitled to preferential treatment, EU officials warn that there are no exceptions to EU accession requirements. Despite Turkey's difficult road with the remaining chapters, the Turkish government is trying to bolster its EU General Secretariat (EUGS) by reorganizing it into three directorates -- civil and culture, implementation, and politics -- and by increasing its staff. The EUGS is planning to hire 64 new experts in December and 100 more deputy experts in 2010. Deputy Head of EUGS Burak Erdenir also publicly commented that the Prime Minister had personally approved a move by the EUGS's newly-created communications unit in early October to launch a comprehensive communications strategy to promote Turkey's EU accession aspirations.

17. (C) Turkey has not set a date as a goal for completion of significant reforms that are needed for movement on its EU accession process. Isik commented that EU Affairs Minister Bagis is continuing to meet with his European counterparts to promote Turkey's initiatives on EU reforms. However, he conceded that there is no plan for forward movement after the technical chapters are opened. Turkish experts at a 26 October EU conference asserted that Turkey has made great strides in its EU accession bid but that progress is still slow and the public could become increasingly frustrated if a date is not set for accession. The Swedes too are concerned and privately noted that they fear that all reforms will grind to a halt if the Cyprus talks collapse, particularly since the Cyprus issue alone has led to blocks on eight chapters. Regardless, Bagis repeatedly emphasized that the EU and Turkey need to work hand in hand to get things done.

Comment

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18. (C) The EU and Turkey appear to be in sync in agreeing that all of the "easy" chapters have been opened, with the remaining reforms hinging on "political" movement on Cyprus and key constitutional changes. The accession pace, never rapid, appears set to slow down markedly in 2010, yet the Turkish Government does not seem to have any firm course of action beyond the next couple of months. The worst-case scenario is a standstill which would place both Turkey and its advocates inside the EU on the defensive. The EU Progress Report's focus on Cyprus appears appropriate since only a successful outcome in Nicosia may be able to provide the necessary boost to Turkey's accession process.

JEFFREY

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